DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 041 034 TE 500 161

AUTHOR Scamman, James Pierce, Jr.
TITLE English Teachers: Assignment Practices
INSTITUTION Iowa Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE 67
NOTE 5p.; In Iowa English Yearbook, n12 p27-31 Fall 1967

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility, Curriculum, Educational Certificates, Educational Improvement, Educational Practice, English, English Curriculum, English Education, English Instruction, *English Programs, Junior High Schools, Language Arts, *Public Schools, Senior High Schools, Teacher Background, Teacher Certification, *Teacher Qualifications, *Teaching Assignment, Teaching Load

ABSTRACT

The problem of finding adequately prepared teachers in public schools is determined to be directly related to school size and grade level in this study. Tables illustrating this principle are derived from a state-wide survey of Iowan junior and senior high schools concerning teaching assignments in the communicative arts during the first semester of the 1964-1965 school year. Administrators are urged to reevaluate the implications of arbitrary teaching assignments and the importance of teacher qualifications. (RL)

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ENGLISH TEACHERS: ASSIGNMENT PRACTICES

James Pierce Scamman Jr.
Minnesota State Department of Education

The assignment of teachers has been largely taken for granted in the American educational system. It has been assumed that once a teacher has achieved that all-important certificate he can teach anything. Often, the feelings, hopes, desires, and career goals of dedicated teachers are sacrificed on the altar of administrative expediency or buried in the mud of small school reorganization problems.

The helpless beginning teacher, operating under the false assumption that he will be able to teach in the area in which he has given his major thrust for several long years of professional preparation, finds himself loaded down with this and that and several other things including classes outside his major area of concentration. Many educators have deplored the existence of these types of situations for many years; the literature is saturated with comments about the administrative advisability of proper teacher assignment, but empirical studies are lacking and misassignment still exists.

The present certification practices of state departments of education measure adequacy to teach by semester hours and programs rather than some other measure of teaching ability. Therefore, hours of preparation must be used as the current criterion for measuring adequacy of preparation of teachers. The minimum standard for teachers of English ranges from 12 semester hours on up. This minimum is scarcely more than the minimum required for completion by all college undergraduates, let alone prospective teachers of the subject.

Regional accreditating agencies have provided leadership in raising this minimal standard beyond that required by the state departments. The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools requires that all teachers in high schools accredited by their organization have at least 18 semester hours in a subject to teach it. The average for the states is somewhat lower.

The Report of the Commission on English of the College Entrance Examination Board, published in 1965, stated that, "At the present time fewer than half of the English teachers in our schools can claim completion of a college major in their subject." In addition to inadequate preparation, the English teacher is expected to teach five classes averaging 28 students each. The Report outlined the desired level of competency of a professional English teacher.

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FALL, 1967

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> Like any other professional person, the professional English teacher is one who has been trained, or has trained himself, to do competent work. For him professional comtence should mean, at the minimum: a college major in English or a strong minor, a preparation sufficient to qualify him to begin graduate study in English; systematic postcollegiate study, carried on privately or in a graduate school; a reading command of at least one foreign language, ancient or modern; a deep interest in literature, old and new, and a solid set of critical skills; the ability to write well and the habit of writing, whether for publication or not; a knowledge of the development of the English language and familiarity with recent work in linguistics; a desire not simply to know but to impart knowledge; skill in the handling of instructional problems and knowledge of the research concerning them; an unflagging interest in the processes by which the young learn to use language effectively and richly.

In order to further delineate the plight of the classroom teacher, a study was recently conducted to determine the relationship between academic preparation of teachers and class assignment. All teachers in grades seven through 12 in the state of Iowa were polled. Iowa was considered to be representative of the upper midwestern states, and it appeared that similar assignment practices existed nationally. Approximately 90 per cent, 13,546, of the teachers in 456 of the 459 secondary school districts in Iowa were utilized; the other 10 per cent failed to respond or returned unusable information.

It was determined that 30 semester hours was minimum adequate preparation for any teacher of any subject to have in that subject. In the data, each class or assignment was listed with the number of semester hours preparation that the teacher assigned to that class reported. The classes were sorted into three categories: classes taught by teachers with fewer than 18 semester hours preparation, or less than a minor, preparation of between 18 and 29 hours, a minor; and 30 or more semester hours, which was considered a major or adequate preparation.

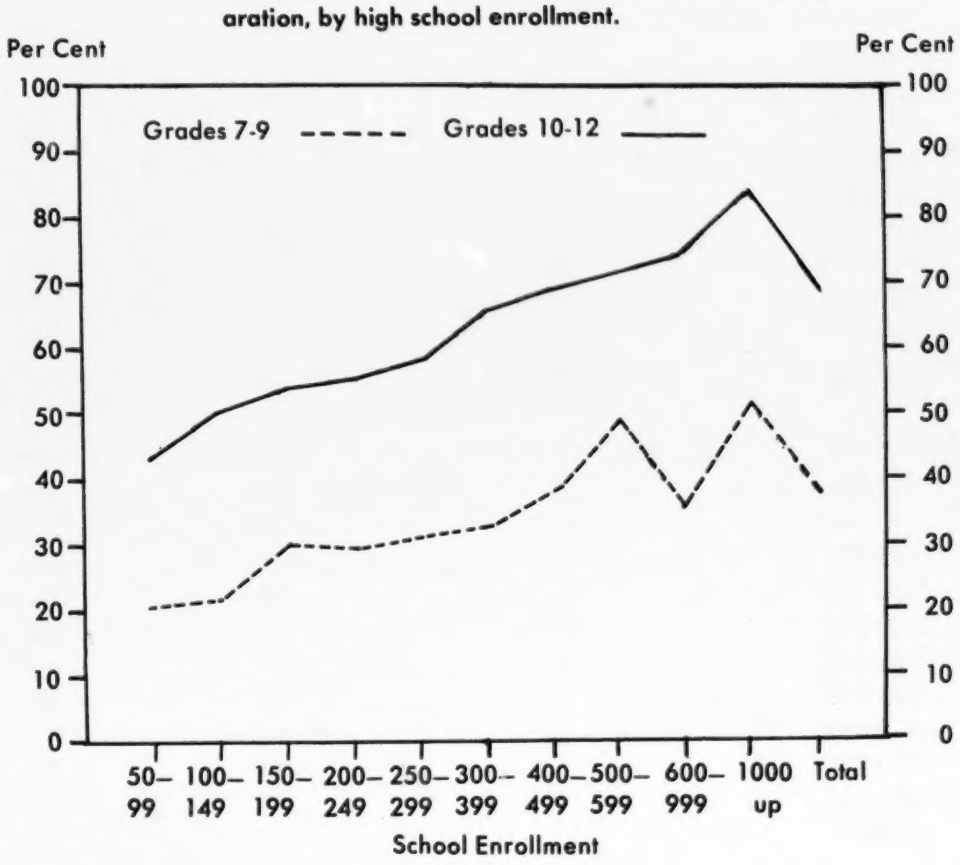
The number of classes taught by teachers with 30 or more hours preparation was divided into the total number of classes to determine a percentage of classes or assignments that fell above the 30 hour minimum. Percentages were also calculated for the other two levels of preparation.

A total of 12,058 classes or assignments in the communicative arts were reported taught in Iowa during the first semester of the 1964-1965 school year. Of this total, 6183 or 51 per cent were taught by teachers with at least 30 semester hours preparation in one or more of the communicative arts fields. (Speech and drama as well as English were combined into one larger field of com-

munication or communicative arts for convenience and reliability.) Twenty-two per cent of all classes were taught by teachers with a minor, and 27 per cent with less than 18 hours credit. Dividing junior high and senior high, 6936 assignments were reported for grades seven through nine, and 5355 for grades 10 through 12. (Junior and senior high combined do not equal 12,058 because classes with both junior high and senior high students were counted in both groups.)

The data in Table 1 indicated graphically the level of preparation of teachers in the junior and senior high by differing four year high school enrollment districts. It can be readily observed that even though the number of classes of communicative arts is larger in grades seven through nine, the preparation of teachers is considerably lower. The range of per cent of classes taught by teachers with at least 30 semester hours preparation for junior high was 21 per cent to 51 per cent. The average was 38. Clearly, the smaller schools staffed English classes with teachers with far less training than did larger schools. The decrease in the 600-999 enrollment stratum was attributed to the increase in size of district to the point that separate junior high schools were maintained but

Table 1. Per cent of assignments taught by communicative arts teachers with at least thirty semester hours preparation, by high school enrollment.



not yet large enough that teachers did not have to teach in more than one subject.

The per cent of classes taught by teachers with at least a major was considerably higher in the grades 10 through 12 than in junior high, although as in grades seven and nine the smaller schools were considerable lower than larger schools. The average percentage was 30 points higher for senior high as compared with the lower grades.

The status of assignment practices in the communicative arts fields is further delineated in Table 2. Table 1 includes only classes taught by teachers with at least 30 semester hours preparation. Table 2 indicates the per cent of classes staffed by teachers with minor (18-29 hours) and less (17 hours and below) preparation. A shockingly large number of classes in junior high were taught

Table 2. Per cent of assignments taught by communicative arts teachers with varying semester hours preparation by differing school sizes for junior high and senior high.

Junior High School

School size	less than minor	minor	major
50-99	71	8	21
100-149	61	16	22
150-199	49	22	30
200-249	45	26	29
250-299	40	30	31
300-399	38	29	33
400-499	40	21	38
500-599	28	24	48
600-999	40	24	36
1000 up	30	18	51
Total	40	22	38

Senior High School

School size	less than minor	minor	major
50-99	23	34	43
100-149	22	28	50
150-199	16	29	55
200-249	16	28	56
250-299	13	29	58
300-399	10	25	65
400-499	7	25	68
500-599	7	22	71
600-999	6	21	73
1000 up	6	11	83
Total	11	21	68

by teachers with less than minor preparation. The old idea that anyone can teach English still seems to prevail. Even in the larger schools, as many as 30 or 40 per cent of junior high communicative arts classes were in the less than minor category. In the largest districts, only 51 per cent were taught by teachers with adequate preparation. That 61 to 71 per cent in the smaller schools taught without even a minor is a situation that should be remedied. If the most critical subject, the one with the most application to future life, the one in which a weakness would likely produce the most disastrous results, were named, it would undoubtedly be communication skills in the junior high. This subject was among the lowest of all subjects in the study, and is probably the most important.

The situation in the senior high schools appears to be somewhat less critical, although the smallest schools are still very low. The time will not likely be reached in the near future when the ideal of every class taught by a teacher with a major in the subject can be realized, but every effort should be made to come as close as possible. The problem of finding adequately prepared teachers is clearly related to school size and grade level. Small schools evidently cannot afford to pay or cannot find enough adequately prepared teachers to fill their needs. The solution seems to be school reorganization that would give these schools the potential to attract and hold top quality professionals. Only a drastic overhaul of our school organizational structures can rid many schools of the problem of inadequacy.

The discrepancy between the junior high and senior high preparation of teachers also is a source of great concern, perhaps even more than the small school problem. There is evidence to indicate that the number of small schools is decreasing, but there is little indication that the role of the junior high is undergoing drastic change. The concept of the junior high as a little or beginning senior high seems to be supported by these findings. The idea that junior high teachers do not need to be as well qualified as senior high teachers is absurd. The formative years of the early teens are among the most difficult for the maturing young person and among the most critical for the development of sound habits of communication. Teachers highly trained in their respective subject fields and competent in dealing effectively with adolescents in the classroom should be employed in the junior high, not those incompetent to work in the senior high.

The efficient or proper assignment of teachers in this era of exploding knowledge and increasing specialization remains one of the most difficult tasks of the school administrator. Care should be taken to make certain that those basic subjects so important to the development of the students are staffed by highly competent and well trained teachers.